DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 379 765 EA 026 509

AUTHOR	McNeir, Gwennis
TITLE	Outcomes-Based Education.
INSTITUTION	ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management, Eugene, Oreg.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	93
CONTRACT	RR93002006
NOTE	5p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Educational Products, National Association of Elementary School Principals, 1615 Duke Street, Alexandria, VA 22314-3483 ($2.50; $2 each on orders of 10 or more; Virginia residents add 4.5% sales tax; specify date and title of issue when ordering; check payable to NAESP must accompany order).
PUB TYPE	Collected Works - Serials (022) -- Information Analyses - ERIC Clearinghouse Products (071) -- Reference Materials - Bibliographies (131)
JOURNAL CIT	Research Roundup; v10 n1 Fall 1993
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Academic Standards; *Competency Based Education; *Educational Objectives; Educational Philosophy; Elementary Secondary Education; Performance; *School Restructuring; Student Certification
IDENTIFIERS	*Outcome Based Education

ABSTRACT

Outcomes-based education (OBE) is a controversial model of educational restructuring that defines learning as what students can demonstrate that they know. This document reviews four journal articles and one bulletin that reflect a range of perspectives on OBE's potential promise and problems. In "Organizing for Results: The Basis of Authentic Restructuring and Reform," William G. Spady contends that the time-based structure prevalent in education favors administrative custody and convenience over student mastery. He offers OBE as an alternative model, outlining the principles and premises of the system, and presenting it as a blueprint for restructuring. In "Perspectives and Imperatives: Some Limitations of OBE," Jim McKernan argues that the notion of predetermined outcomes is antithetical to the nature of education, which he considers to be process-oriented and exploratory. He offers an alternative model that is more compatible with his concept of a liberal education. Gwennis McNeir, in "Outcomes-Based Education: Tool for Restructuring," clarifies the concept of OBE, explores the primary objections, and identifies elements that educators believe are crucial to its successful implementation. In "One District Learns About Restructuring," Charles E. Sams and Randy Schenkat describe how moving to an OBE model was the missing piece in a restructuring process in their district that included innovation but lacked a clear purpose. Kathleen A. Fitzpatrick provides an indepth account of how her district successfully implemented an OBE system, in "Restructuring To Achieve Outcomes of Significance for All Students." She offers examples of how to draft visionary outcomes, develop performance indicators, and shift instructional focus to match OBE guidelines. (LMI)

VOLUME 10, NUMBER 1
FALL 1993

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Research ROUNDUP

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

ED 379 765

Outcomes-Based Education

Gwennis McNeir

As educators continue their efforts to enhance the quality of America's schools, they are presented with a variety of tools and methods for improvement, each with its own merits and challenges. Outcomes-Based Education (OBE) is one model of educational restructuring that has gained increasing support—and attracted close scrutiny—in recent years.

Traditionally, educators have measured learning in terms of Carnegie units or standardized tests. In contrast, Outcomes-Based Education defines learning as what students can demonstrate that they know. Instead of specific content requirements, the OBE curriculum is derived from a set of broad, visionary goals designed to enable students to lead effective lives after they leave school. Built on the notion of "success for all students," OBE seeks to improve on methods in which only a fraction of students usually excel.

OBE is a controversial concept. Its detractors charge that OBE seeks to instill values rather than skills and knowledge, and that it employs what amounts to behavior modification to force students to conform. Supporters point to dramatic results from functioning OBE programs, including improved student achievement and greater focus and commitment from staff. However, even its backers note that implementing OBE will take time and presents many challenges.

The five items reviewed here reflect a range of perspectives regarding OBE's potential promise and problems.

William G. Spady, a developer and advocate of OBE, contends that the time-based structure prevalent in education favors administrative custody and convenience over student mastery. He offers OBE as an alternative model, outlining the principles and premises of the system, and presenting it as a blueprint for restructuring.

Jim McKernan provides a critique of OBE from both a theoretical and a practical standpoint. He argues that the notion of predetermined outcomes is antithetical to the nature of education, which he considers to be process-oriented and exploratory. McKernan views OBE as having limited usefulness and offers an alternative model that is more compatible with his concept of a liberal education.

Gwennis McNeir, in a review and synthesis of research on OBE, clarifies the concept, explores the primary objections, and identifies elements that educators believe are crucial to its successful implementation. McNeir also lists other practical suggestions from administrators and teachers.

Charles E. Sams and *Randy Schenkat* describe how moving to an OBE model was the missing piece in a restructuring process in their district that included innovation and vision but lacked a clear purpose. They illustrate how OBE helped make their vision more tangible, and they cite four main areas of concentration in the transition to OBE.

Kathleen A. Fitzpatrick gives an in-depth account of how her district successfully implemented an OBE system, describing both the challenges and solutions that she and her colleagues discovered. Detailing each step in the process, she offers examples of

Gwennis McNeir is a research analyst and writer for the ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management at the University of Oregon.

EA 026 509

 BEST COPY AVAILABLE

drafting visionary outcomes, developing performance indicators, and shifting instructional focus to match OBE guidelines.

Spady, William G. **"Organizing for Results: The Basis of Authentic Restructuring and Reform."** *Educational Leadership* 46:2 (October 1988): 4-8.

According to Spady, traditional methods of education are ineffective and even detrimental because they are organized almost exclusively around the calendar and the clock. A teacher covers a given amount of material for a specified length of time, and learning is then assumed to have taken place.

When time is the constant, student learning becomes the variable. The result of most prevalent practice is the familiar bell-shaped curve, which reflects a few students who excel, a few who fail, and a majority who achieve at average or below-average levels.

In contrast, OBE espouses a success-for-all philosophy. Spady asserts that this can be accomplished by focusing on educational outcomes, not inputs. "Visionary exit outcomes"—what we want students to know and be able to do on leaving school—should go beyond narrow subject requirements to embrace skills and knowledge that will best allow students to lead effective and productive lives in a high-pressure global culture. Once established, broad exit outcomes guide every aspect of the instructional system.

Spady identifies three key operational principles of OBE. The first is clarity of focus on outcomes. Teachers must clearly identify what outcomes students will be expected to demonstrate successfully, and must provide ongoing feedback about how students are progressing toward those goals.

Second, teachers must provide expanded opportunity and instructional support by adopting a coaching approach, allowing students extra time and opportunities to improve performance.

Finally, schools must foster high expectations for learning success, insisting that all students, not just a few, consistently reach high levels of performance.

McKernan, Jim. **"Perspectives and Imperatives: Some Limitations of Outcome-Based Education."** *Journal of Curriculum and Supervision* 8:4 (Summer 1993): 343-353.

McKernan questions many of the underlying assumptions of OBE. He begins by asserting that the premise itself—teaching with a specific outcome in mind—contradicts the liberal notion of education as induction into knowledge. He argues that treating knowledge as a means to a specific end denies the possibility that educational experiences are valuable for their own sake.

McKernan objects to several other aspects of the OBE model. He is concerned that it "reduces teaching and learning to human engineering," and that it borrows from principles of behavior modification. He disputes the notion that knowledge can be sequentially broken down and counters that knowledge is open-ended inquiry, not mastery of facts.

In addition, he notes a tendency for outcomes to be stated in such a way that external testing is the only way of determining whether they have been met, and cautions that such tests more often measure what students do not know than what they know. Finally, he contends that the linear OBE model is not reflexive or self-examining, but dictates the ends of learning before teaching and learning have begun.

As a "rational alternative" to OBE, McKernan offers the Procedural Inquiry Model, which consists of three main components. The first is the broad aim of advancing understanding of controversial issues. The second branch, referred to as principles of procedure, rests on the assertion that discussion is the best strategy for meeting this aim, and that the teacher should function as a facilitator who remains neutral on "values" issues. The third component consists of criteria for assessing student performance; it includes such indicators as how well students use concepts and knowledge to explore issues.

McKernan observes that in this model the teaching process and principles become the objectives and outcomes. He stresses the importance of a complex, caring relationship between teacher and student, which he believes is under-emphasized in OBE and related models.

About ERIC

The Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) is a national information system operated by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI). The ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management, one of 16 such units in the system, was established at the University of Oregon in 1966.

This publication was prepared by the Clearinghouse with funding from OERI, U.S. Department of Education, under contract no. OERI-RR-93002006. No federal funds were used in the printing of this publication.

ERIC® Clearinghouse on Educational Management
University of Oregon, 1787 Agate St., Eugene, Oregon 97403. Phone 1-800-488-8841.

McNeir, Gwennis. **Outcomes-Based Education: Tool for Restructuring.** Oregon School Study Council Bulletin 36:8 (April 1993). 29 pages. $7.00. Available from Oregon School Study Council, 1787 Agate St., Eugene, OR 97403. 800-438-8841.

McNeir introduces and defines OBE, explaining how it differs from earlier reform movements such as Competency-Based Education (CBE). She presents responses to OBE and observes that, in spite of divergent views about its potential, OBE is being implemented in many districts nationwide.

Implementation of an OBE system is intensely challenging and requires changes in nearly every aspect of school operations. McNeir notes that a common pitfall for educators is failure to fully commit to the process. Instead, OBE philosophy is often superimposed onto a preexisting curriculum and methods. Even when change is welcomed, leaders face the problems of generating support and aligning school goals with legislative requirements.

McNeir found that educators identify drafting exit outcomes as the most complex and difficult part of the implementation process—and the most crucial to success. Practitioners note the importance of involving all segments of the community in generating clearly defined outcomes, since these outcomes will ultimately reflect community values.

Educators describe further challenges once an OBE system has been implemented: Striking a balance between curriculum content and the OBE process; restructuring classroom practices to allow for expanded educational opportunities; and creating new methods of assessment.

Practitioners view collective partnerships and clearly defined goals as keys to OBE success. Support is maintained by keeping all members of a community involved through an ongoing system of communication and feedback. Educators stay focused by continually referring back to outcomes and by setting measurable objectives.

McNeir provides suggestions gleaned from educators embarking on the OBE process, including acknowledging the difficulties involved, setting manageable goals, and accepting transitional measures to allow time for growth to occur.

Sams, Charles E., and Randy Schenkat. **"One District Learns About Restructuring."** *Educational Leadership* 47:7 (April 1990): 72-75.

This article illustrates how a district that is already engaged in improvement and restructuring can employ the principles of OBE to achieve greater effectiveness. Sams and Schenkat outline the current state of the Winona School District in Minnesota, and contrast it with the desired state embodied in the principles of OBE.

To successfully make the transition, four primary areas of focus were pursued: Communicating the vision of OBE, both internally and externally, within the district; developing and documenting successful pilot programs; empowering staff to modify traditions and regulations; and building the capacity of school sites to control conditions of success.

Efforts to communicate the OBE vision included inviting a guest lecturer to introduce the concept, holding follow-up meetings, forming a communications network, and scheduling monthly meetings. Further efforts included creating a staff development committee that links district staff members who are involved in OBE with practitioners in other regional districts.

To overcome what the authors describe as a "healthy skepticism" of the concept that all students can succeed, the Winona district accumulated tangible evidence of OBE's effectiveness by using teacher volunteers to develop and test OBE pilot programs. The district has also worked in partnership with the Minnesota State Department of Education to find flexibility in regulations, and study committees have been formed to investigate alternatives to different educational practices.

Sams and Schenkat stress the importance of specialized training for principals and staff leaders. They describe the district's participation in the Minnesota Administrators Training Program, which provides training in areas such as work group organization, resource development, and performance planning. They consider the strength of their program to be "the synergy created when a staff as a whole collaborates to change unfavorable conditions."

Fitzpatrick, Kathleen A. **"Restructuring to Achieve Outcomes of Significance for All Students."** *Educational Leadership* 48:8 (May 1991): 18-22.

When the leadership of District 214 in Arlington Heights, Illinois, envisioned the skills and knowledge students would need for the future, it drafted these exit outcomes:

- Ability to communicate;
- Facility in social interaction;

- Analytic capabilities;
- Problem-solving skills;
- Skill in making value judgments and decisions;
- Skill in creative expression and response to creative work of others;
- Civic responsibility;
- Responsible participation in a global environment;
- Skill in developing and maintaining wellness;
- Skill in using technology as a tool for learning;
- Skill in life and career planning.

Fitzpatrick stresses that these objectives are not simply philosophical goal statements, but outcomes that students will be required to demonstrate. She then describes how her district moved from these broad exit outcomes to designing program-level outcomes. Curriculum frameworks were then created, based on an outline of the most appropriate sequence of learning within each program. The result is a flexible curriculum in which credits and the number of courses may vary with individual students, but what is to be learned remains constant.

The challenging task of developing performance-based indicators to gauge how well students were achieving essential outcomes was a critical step. Solutions required students to demonstrate ability to:

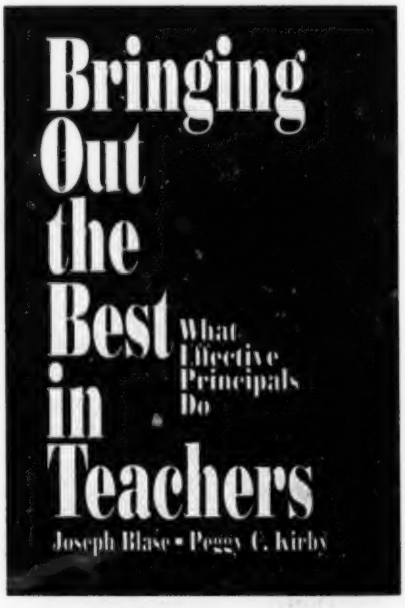
- Employ observation skills;
- Classify and organize information;
- Draw and support inferences;
- Describe and define relationships; and to
- Integrate and apply these skills in a variety of situations.

Next, a framework was created that identified three levels of achievement: Developing a knowledge base; demonstrating practical applications of exit outcomes; and transferring learning to new situations. These phases reflect a developmental sequence of student achievement as well as a shift in teaching emphasis, with the teacher's role changing from instructor to coach and facilitator.

While many researchers note the positive effects of a "second-chance" process to provide students with an expanded opportunity for success, Fitzpatrick acknowledges that implementing such a process poses serious challenges. She describes how her district addressed these challenges through a restructured placement program and an outcomes-based grading procedure.

Research Roundup is published three times during the school year by the National Association of Elementary School Principals. Single copies: $2.50; bulk orders (10 or more): $2.00 ea. Virginia residents add 4.5% sales tax. Specify date and title of issue when ordering. Checks payable to NAESP must accompany order. Send to Educational Products, NAESP, 1615 Duke Street, Alexandria, Virginia 22314-3483.

Bringing out the Best in Teachers: What Effective Principals Do



Find out what it takes to inspire a willing and motivated teacher, from 800 teachers who describe in detail what their principals do on a daily basis to influence and empower them. Each chapter concludes with a set of recommendations based on successful experience. 160 pp.

Item # BOTB-RR. Members—$18.00. Non-members—$22.50.

Please add $3.50 for shipping and handling. Allow 4-6 weeks for delivery. Send check or purchase order to:

NAESP Educational Products
1615 Duke Street
Alexandria, VA 22314-3483